

## Chocolate Kisses by hearteyedkaspbrak

**Category:** IT (Movies - Muschietti), IT - Stephen King

**Genre:** Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, Alternate Universe - Everyone Lives/Nobody Dies, F/M, Fix-It, Food as a Metaphor for Love, Hurt/Comfort, Injury Recovery, Love Confessions, M/M, Major Character Injury, Miscommunication, Multi, Mutual Pining, No Smut, Slow Burn

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough, Eddie Kaspbrak, Mike Hanlon, Myra Kaspbrak, Patricia Blum Uris, Pennywise (IT), Richie Tozier, Stanley Uris

**Relationships:** Ben Hanscom/Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough/Mike Hanlon/Stanley Uris/Patricia Blum Uris, Eddie Kaspbrak/Myra Kaspbrak, Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier

**Status:** In-Progress

**Published:** 2019-12-01

**Updated:** 2019-12-08

**Packaged:** 2019-12-16 18:35:22

**Rating:** Teen And Up Audiences

**Warnings:** Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

**Chapters:** 2

**Words:** 6,841

**Publisher:** archiveofourown.org

**Summary:**

Stan was the first one to leave, sprinting for his car with the same fearfully determined exuberance that 27 years did nothing to subdue, the house that once stood on Neibolt Street collapsed around them mere moments after they made it to safety. As the dirt and old dust rose in a heavy plume above them, Stan pulled up right outside the gate so they could get Richie into the back. Eddie held him close and made sure he stayed awake, tapping none too gently against his cheek as Stan climbed into the passenger seat in front of them. Mike was quick to take the wheel and sped off, leaving the others to pile into the remaining cars and follow after them to the hospital, no one wasting a single second as the remains of the house settled into the ground, burying their past once and for all in Its oversized grave.

After all seven losers defeat It, Richie ends up in the hospital, giving Eddie time to think about what happened in the cavern.

A Chapter 2 fix-it fic where both Stan and Eddie live. Over the course of the next few months, Eddie and Richie try to come to terms with forgotten feelings and how to move forward together.

## 1. Fallen on Hard Times

### Author's Note:

this fic came about because im very much in denial about eddie and stan lmao they deserve their own happy endings and damn it im going to give it to them

i hope you enjoy!

beta'd by staniel-the-maniel on tumblr, thank you!

Eddie Kaspbrak hates hospitals.

He's all too familiar with them, grew up in one, practically; white walls, white floors, the scent of bleach strong enough to choke on. Even after 27 years it's all just as consuming as it was when he was 13, something that should've bothered him but was pushed to the back of his mind considering the current circumstance. At the moment the only sound is the squeaking of rubber against linoleum as Eddie wears out the tile. He takes long strides to and from the wonky table holding an old coffee machine with some flimsy Styrofoam cups, one of which he's been holding for the past 3 hours.

The coffee is bitter.

It lingers on his tongue and leaves an awful taste in his mouth, but that doesn't stop him from being thankful for it as he takes another sip of the cold remains of his beverage and turns on his heel to walk back the way he came. It was either he swirled the bitterness around in his stubbornly dry mouth or he remember the burn of sewer water that previously haunted him; he'd swallowed too much of it trying to rush out of that dark place and he knew the dangers of ingesting such filth, but he didn't even think to wash it off until he'd returned back

to the townhouse with the others. They'd cleaned themselves up, brought some hastily grabbed clothes with them, and then piled back into their cars to speed to the hospital where Bill was waiting for them with tired eyes and shaking hands.

He'd been brushing his teeth on autopilot when he'd thrown up all the contents of his stomach onto the blood-stained porcelain, adding to the black sludge he'd tried to scrub off his face earlier. Just thinking about it makes him want to refill his cup, but his hand stops on the way to his mouth.

The coffee looks like that same black sludge. His hand drops to his side and his feet keep moving as he turns once more and walks past the row of waiting chairs, his tongue burning in his mouth.

He can't stop pacing. If he does he knows he'll crash.

Beverly is looking after him with soft eyes, silently watching the emotions wash over his face one after another. As he passes her for another lap she grabs tight the fabric of his jacket, giving a gentle tug. 'Honey, sit down,' she offers softly, more a suggestion than a command, but it still sounds like one to him. He doesn't want to stop, he feels the second he sits down something is going to go wrong, like if he allows him to relax then it'll all go to hell. He has to keep walking, keep moving, keeping doing anything other than what she wants. But one look at her face makes his knees weak. He all but collapses into the empty seat in between her and Stan, the latter resting his chin on his clasped hands, his knee bouncing as he stares straight ahead; the bandages covering his wrists are just barely visible beneath the hem of his uncharacteristically ruffled shirt.

Beside Stan, Bill sits with his right hand on Stan's other knee, keeping

it still, his left holding onto Mike's own to calm his own shaking; it hasn't subsided since they'd arrived. Ben sits to Bev's left, glancing at her every now and again as if to make sure she's okay but not wanting to break the silence. Eddie has taken in every possible detail about them all in his pacing that he doesn't even need to look up to know that Ben is glancing again as Beverly moves once he sits, quickly putting a calming hand to his back.

It's almost as if she can read his mind as she says, 'He's going to be fine,' the perfect comforting sentence a person can possibly say in this sort of situation. It's the same thing the doctor told his mother when he broke his arm all those years ago, his words like a drug she needed to swallow up over and over as he was fed more bullshit to keep the pain away. He was different from his mother and from how he was back then, in that regard, as he consumes her words and chews them up, and while he would never call them such, it's still that familiar bullshit all the same.

He lets out a shaky breath as he closes in on himself, shoulders hunched and hands clasped tight in front of his mouth; he doesn't want to but he goes back to that place, remembers so vividly how oppressive the air and sounds and lights were that it almost feels like he's still there, like the hospital was just a dream and he'd never escaped. The hand on his back presses its fingers a little harder and he knows it's not a fantasy, but the next breath still quivers as it passes through his chapped lips.

The Deadlights, even though he never looked at them directly, still flash behind his eyelids, forever burnt into his memory from the sheer power they gave off. The colour, thinking back on it now, is hard to describe, although he doesn't think he actually wants to in retrospect. They had lit up the entire cavern, every inch and crevice alight with Its true form and it still feels so invasive, like It had done so much more to them even when they had averted their eyes and blocked out Its calls. He wants to claw his own eyes out but he knows

it won't help, just one final punchline to the Clown's 27-year-long joke, but honestly if it weren't for the people around him, he's sure he'd try it anyway.

He lets out a pathetic laugh into his hands, knowing deep down that he didn't even have it the worst in there; Bev was the one who was stuck in the Deadlights for who knows how long before they found her, and Stan was forced to look into them as It dug Its teeth into his face and held on until he gave up. He hadn't seen them back then, and even as they found it mere hours ago now he had only seen the light they gave off, eyes looking everywhere but where It wanted them all to look.

Only one of them had been caught this time, and he was the reason why they were all there.

The moment the fence spike had pierced the back of Its head, It had thrown Richie like a ragdoll to the hard ground, his body rolling before coming to a dead stop against the wall as he lay in a crumbled heap. Eddie had barely noticed how silent everything way around them as he dropped to his knees in front of Richie and tried to wake him up; his fingers had dug into the other man's biceps so fiercely he'd been afraid he might bruise him, but despite all the pain he should've been yelling about, Richie just lay there looking up at the ceiling with empty, white eyes.

*Wake up. Wake up. Fuck! Wake up, Richie! I killed It! I fucking killed It! Please, you can wake up!*

Yelling, shaking, a hard slap to the face, Eddie tried them all in

different combinations but Richie hadn't responded, his hundred-yard stare never tearing away from the stalactites pouring down from the roof of the cave. Eddie had started to feel all the joy he had gathered up from the past two days begin to melt away, slipping through his fingers as he desperately gripped onto Richie's shirt, and as he lowered his head onto his friend's chest he'd remembered the final piece of the puzzle from that summer.

A kiss.

Ben had believed it would work on Beverly and it had, freeing her from the Deadlights when his calls hadn't. If it had worked for her then it had to work for him too, there was no reason why it shouldn't, right? So he'd kissed him, he'd braced himself on Richie's slowly rising chest with his left hand, then cupped his cheek so gently that if Richie were awake then he'd surely tease him for it with his right, and kissed him.

The second Eddie pulled away, Richie startled awake with a shuddering gasp so loud and sudden that it made him jump. He sat there, almost dumbfounded as Richie looked right into his eyes, and he thought for a split second that he was about to be kissed back when the hand reaching up for his face clapped hard against the back of his neck instead. Richie grabbed onto Eddie's shoulder with his other hand and used all his strength to roll them over, just milliseconds before the claw that was aiming for him stabbed where they just were. The uneven ground sent them tumbling further down into the cave, Richie holding Eddie tight to his chest, though it didn't protect him from the sharp pangs as the rocks dug into his back. Once at the bottom, they'd separated to gather their bearings, Richie checking over Eddie like *he'd* been the one to get hurt.

'Eddie,' Richie gasped, fingers clutching tight to Eddie's hoodie like a

lifeline, 'Eddie, you-' His eyes are wild as he choked on his words. He can't seem to catch his breath, so Eddie grabbed his shoulders as a way of grounding. At his touch Richie calmed, a small shudder getting caught up in his throat before he pulled Eddie into a crushing hug. Eddie held back, just as tight, wheezing through the pressure.

'I killed it!' Eddie felt himself beaming against Richie's shoulder; he'd saved him, he'd actually done it and they were really going to all get out of there alive. 'I got him, Richie!'

And suddenly their embrace is cut short when Richie is yanked roughly from his grasp. Eddie heard Its unpleasant laugh boom throughout the cavern as he reached out on instinct, a moment too late as Richie was dragged back up and into the cave, landing hard on his back dangerously close to a broken stalagmite when It let go. Eddie barely had any time to react as Pennywise snatched Richie back up by the leg, hauling him into the air and dangling him front of Eddie like junk ready to be thrown out.

'C'mon, Eds,' It called out tauntingly, Richie's face screwed up in pain as his body flailed back and forth, 'Mommy isn't here anymore to take your favourite toy away!' a white-hot rage seared through Eddie's chest as he scrambled to his feet, It chortling at him as Richie moved a bit too close to the obsidian spikes made from Its crash. 'You still want to play with him, don't you? You still want to keep him even though he's old,' this time Richie banged into a spike, tearing through his coat but not his arm, 'and replaceable,' one long leg stomped into the ground to Eddie's right, forcing the others back as they tried to get to them, 'and *dirty*?!'

For as long as he lives, Eddie will never forget the sickening crunch as Richie's leg was broken, Its large hand squeezing until his bone gave out under the pressure like a twig.

Eddie ran to Richie without a second thought to the 70 ft tall clown-spider still hanging onto him, Beverly's screaming drowned out by the sound of his heart pounding in his ears. He jumped up and just barely grazed Richie's limp hand, frantically attempting to grab hold and pull Richie from Its grasp before It could hurt him again; he wasn't even thinking about himself and the danger his own life was in, the large motherfucker could aim one of those gigantic claws right at him for all he cared, just as long as he could get Richie free first. In fact, he was so hellbent on saving him that he hadn't even noticed as Mike and Stan appeared on the other side of the cavern, Stan screaming at It with wildly furious eyes, his hands pulled tight into fists.

Later, when they were safe and he had time to slow himself down and think about it, it was almost like a miracle occurred with their arrival, Pennywise focusing on them, or their words more rather, long enough for Eddie to take Richie's hand and heave; he slipped easily out of Its hand as it turned on their friends, Eddie instinctively taking the fall for him as Richie dropped headfirst to the ground. He protected his friend's head as they landed undeniably painfully on the cold stone, going over him and making sure he was okay before allowing himself to breathe again.

Over the blood rushing in his ears, he distantly heard Beverly speak up next, Ben and Bill's voices quick to also join in as they caught on to what Stan has started. Eddie choked on his words at first, the determination and hate and rage that fuelled him before now starting to wane, but he still managed to scream with all he had left. His voice was strong as he called It a leper and a fucking *pathetic* clown, Richie groaning on his lap and pawing at Eddie's arms around him. The feeling of his hands on his wrist snapped his attention back to him, and just seeing him laying there was what finally made it all real in his mind.

He thought he'd killed It, this shouldn't have been *happening*.

'Fuck, Richie-' Eddie took in the scene, his mouth dry and eyes watering; Richie's leg was fucked to hell, much worse than the break he'd himself suffered through back in that summer, and it was more the thought, the fact that Richie had been hurt this badly, than the sight of it that nearly made him gag. For once he didn't know what to do, they hadn't brought anything that he could scrounge together for an injury that bad. 'I thought I got It.' His breathing quickened as the panic started to settle back in.

'Oh, that's bad.' Richie wasn't even listening to him, his voice distant, like he was just barely hanging on to consciousness; there was so much blood soaking through his pant leg, the colour draining fast from his face as he hovered a shaking hand over his shin. Eddie wasn't sure if he was unsteady because of the shock or the pain, but whatever the cause, it wasn't long before Richie's hand slumped back to his side as he then promptly passed out.

Eddie felt his apprehension spike, his eyes unsuccessfully blinking away the tears as he scrambled to pull Richie back into a sitting position. His hand brushed anxiously through his hair as he called for the others, his voice cracking the longer it took them to come. The shouting had stopped by that point, the clown gone hopefully for good and the cavern dark now that the Deadlights were snuffed out, and the sight of Bill appearing over the ridge of the crater, the others following close behind, gave him a sense of relief so strong he gasped out a sob. 'Richie- h-he... We have to get him to a hospital.'

As they pulled him to his feet, Richie blinked back into consciousness, Mike and Ben supporting most of his weight; his disorientation wasn't helped by the fact that the place was coming down around them, and that just made Eddie all the more

determined to see that he went first. Bev led the way back as they trailed behind, none of them stopping despite their pain and exhaustion, no one wanting to leave someone else behind; if it wasn't for Stan and Bill helping him up the well, Eddie thought that he wouldn't have made it out.

Stan was the first one to leave, sprinting for his car with the same fearfully determined exuberance that 27 years did nothing to subdue, the house that once stood on Neibolt Street collapsed around them mere moments after they made it to safety. As the dirt and old dust rose in a heavy plume above them, Stan pulled up right outside the gate so they could get Richie into the back. Eddie held him close and made sure he stayed awake, tapping none too gently against his cheek as Stan climbed into the passenger seat in front of them. Mike was quick to take the wheel and sped off, leaving the others to pile into the remaining cars and follow after them to the hospital, no one wasting a single second as the remains of the house settled into the ground, burying their past once and for all in Its oversized grave.

'C'mon, don't fall asleep on me, buddy,' Eddie kept repeating as Richie tried to wave him off, his mumbled persistence that he was fine cancelling itself out as his eyes drooped more and more with each passing minute. Eddie chewed at his lip and went to try again when he finally noticed Stan looking back at him from the rear-view mirror; his eyes were tired and his normally well-kept curls were plastered to his forehead with sweat and grime. He was still shaking like a leaf, but when he caught Eddie's eye he made an attempt to still his hands by straightening out his sleeves. While Eddie hadn't noticed in the panic and dark, he could see all too clearly now that the fabric near his wrists was drenched with blood.

'It tried to make me do what I'd seen, back in the Deadlights, I mean,' Stan explained without prompting, Mike glancing over before taking a hand off the wheel to place on Stan's own, 'but It wasn't strong enough, not this time.' Eddie watched as Mike gave Stan a small

squeeze of comfort before grabbing the wheel once more and stepping on the gas, the Risk Analyst part of Eddie's mind unusually quiet as they wove through the slow Derry traffic. When Richie nodded off again, Eddie was about to wake him when Stan reached back and gently took his wrist, calmly telling him to let him rest and to make sure he could get back out of the car as easily as possible once they arrived, for Richie's sake.

The part of Eddie's brain that would normally scream about concussions and excessive blood loss and red lights and taking too long just barely kept quiet as they hit the main road.

When they arrived at Derry's small, local hospital, Eddie was running solely on fumes; Mike had hardly stopped the car when Eddie, having already placed Richie's head from his lap and onto the car seat, took off like a bullet from a gun. The sliding doors were almost a bit too slow as he threw himself inside and caught the attention of the first nurse he saw, startling her so badly she nearly dropped her clipboard. 'We need a stretcher, my friend is seriously fucked up!' he demanded, a nearby mother gasping and slapping her hands over her young child's ears.

The nurse took a second to process what she was seeing before she took care of it, a couple emergency workers rushing out to the car to collect Richie. As he was wheeled in, the other losers gathered around the front desk to give the receptionist their info, Mike using his credibility as the kindly librarian to reassure her that his friends were all good people; now that It was gone, the police were bound to start giving a fuck after a while, and the last thing they all needed was to go down to the station the second they left the building. He could see the receptionist become paler with every new injury she took in, the nurse from before eventually asking if they'd also like to be assisted once they were done.

Eddie didn't blame them, in proper lighting they looked like they'd been on the bad end of a toxic landslide, but even with his own injuries and a very open wound in his cheek he much rather wanted to know if Richie would be okay; he'd suffered through much worse, this was nothing. He waited until the nurse became preoccupied with Bill's story of how they were exploring an old house for nostalgia's sake when the floor had collapsed, it only partially a lie and easy enough to build off of, and took off down the hall in the direction Richie had been taken. He knew this place better than his own home and it didn't take long to find Richie, the nurses cutting through his clothes and the doctor prepping for surgery to clean and fix his leg.

He didn't get to stay long as the same nurse from before caught up to him, insisting that he come with her; it took everything he had to not tell her to fuck off.

Back in the emergency room, Stan was already getting patched up and checked for obvious signs of self harm, Mike the next to go in as another bed was freed up. Eddie was well beyond exhausted by that point, looping back around to a near manic state as he kept his eyes on the hallway he'd just come from, only looking away when he's called in; Eddie barely feels it as the nurse closes up the wound on his cheek, too high on adrenaline. One by one they passed each other on the way to see a doctor, none of them going further than the bathroom or the coffee machine if need be. They took up their own corner of the room, all of them huddled as close to each other as physically possible, still tense as they waited for some news.

They knew how weird it looked, they could feel the eyes of the others in the emergency room, but they didn't care. They all made it out, and that was all that mattered.

While Richie was in surgery, the other losers made the almost reluctant decision to go back to the townhouse and shower before coming back; getting some fresh air and clean clothes would help at least their mental state a little, Stan was very insistent on that. Eddie had to be convinced, to no one's surprise, however. The thought of Richie by himself at the hospital twisted his insides, and he knew as he met their eyes that they all felt the same. Despite the time, the arguments, the lying and heartache and forgetting, they were forever bonded.

As they drove back, Eddie's gaze fell onto the blood stains left behind on the back seat, and a part of him wished that it had been himself instead.

## 2. Under Pressure

When the Losers had convened back at the hospital, they had come prepared to wait. Eddie knew well enough that fixing up a busted leg wouldn't have a quick Band-Aid solution of an ending, but for however long they waited in reality, to him, it felt like an eternity and then some. He had started on the coffee when sitting around made him antsy, just as an excuse to get up and move, but when the coffee had proved to be too much to focus on between adding his desired sweeteners, he had moved on to pacing instead.

And so there he had been, walking back and forth over the length of the waiting chairs for a good hour until Bev had forced him to sit again. He was holding the cup so intensely that his nails are starting to dig crescents into the Styrofoam, Stan noticing when he hears a few drops of coffee hit the floor. Without a word he stands, taking the cup from Eddie and throwing it away to avoid causing a mess, the action snapping him out of his bitter reminiscence. He blinks a few times, returning to the present, Stan giving him a soft smile as he returns to his seat.

Stan takes out his phone to give his hands something to do, his knee no longer shaking as he and Bill quietly work on an online crossword puzzle to keep themselves busy. Eddie watches as Stan easily fills in the first couple of words before he checks his own phone, something he'd been ignoring since he got to Derry; 50+ missed messages and 17 voicemails, all from the same person. He frowns and scrolls through the messages, and while before he'd be inclined to answer back, now he feels nothing towards the sender other than veiled contempt. With the fog lifted from Derry, it's like his own fog has receded as well, and whatever reason he had felt he needed to be with her was now withdrawing.

Not all the way, but still, he doesn't know how he is ever going to

return back to her after all of this.

He reaches the bottom of the messages and taps out a meagre, 'Everything's fine, phone died, charging it while I shower,' as his excuse before silencing his notifications. Immediately she texts him back but he doesn't read it, his phone going back into his pocket, but not before he catches sight of the time: 11:46, it's been nearly six hours since they left Neibolt.

'What the fuck is taking them so long?'

He doesn't even realize he's said it out loud until Bev turns to look at him, concern evident on her face. 'You know it takes time,' she tries, but thinking about how long it took them to fix his own arm just makes it start to itch under the skin. 'He's going to be fine, trust me.'

'I trusted you when you told me it kills monsters,' he mutters under his breath before he can stop himself, and the room falls so silent that it's like he's stolen all sound from the world. 'Bev, I didn't mean that-' Eddie flounders in shock at his own words but she is just as kind and understanding as she always is, her smile sad but not disingenuous as she takes his hands in her own.

'I know.'

The sound returns to the room and Eddie excuses himself to the restroom to wash his face, making sure to walk extra slow to waste time. It's a decent enough distance from the waiting room and shouldn't take more than a couple minutes to go in, do his business, and get out, but he stands in front of the mirror and stares at his

reflection before he does anything else. The shower has done him good, but he couldn't wash away the dark circles under his eyes, nor the large bandage covering up the fresh stitches in his cheek. He gets lost in the reflection, nearly lifeless eyes trailing over his face and torso until he becomes a stranger, and he gingerly touches his own cheek to make sure he's real, he's there, he's awake.

The contact stings. His reflection flinches back at him.

He washes his face and returns to the waiting room, and it takes him a moment to notice that everyone has gone from sitting in a row to standing in a semicircle around someone new. He rushes over when it clicks that this man is here about Richie, and he just about trips into Mike. 'Yes, we're the group that came with Richard Tozier,' he confirms, the doctor's assistant nodding and checking over his clipboard.

'Is he okay?' Eddie blurts out when the other man takes too long to speak, Mike grabbing his hand to ground him. The assistant holds up a hand, motioning for them to follow him to a more private location. Eddie just about walks out of the room before the assistant like he knew where he was going, but Mike's grip held him back.

The assistant mentions that Richie is stable as they walk, but that's it until they reach their destination.

One by one they pile into a little room adjacent from the secretary's large desk. It's a squeeze with all six of them huddled in front of the assistant's desk, but there's still comfort in being so close together. The assistant is currently giving them all a reassuring smile, which hopefully is the result of some good news for the first time in three days. As he tries to decipher if it's truly genuine or not, this time it's

Ben who has a hand on Eddie's shoulder, the latter clasping his hands so hard he loses a considerable amount of colour in his knuckles.

The assistant flips through a clipboard with a lot of words on it. 'So you say you were... exploring the old house out on Neibolt when it collapsed?'

'That is correct, yes,' Stan says, his voice filled with that same distinct level of professionalism that he'd had even when he was a child. The assistant, whose name Eddie can now read as Dr. Quinn thanks to the shiny nameplate on his desk, levels them with a kind of look that says he doesn't really believe them; not only do they not look like the type of people who trespass into condemned homes for fun, especially not Stan, but he was probably told about how they entered the hospital, covered in drying sewer water, and, particularly in Beverly's case, blood. The whole thing must seem very suspicious now that Its presence was no longer affecting the town, with the biggest tell being just how badly Richie's leg is broken. There's no way he believes them, but if he doesn't he doesn't question them apart from the look.

'Alright, and after the floor gave way, causing injuries to several if not all of you, you brought Mr. Tozier here to treat his broken leg,' Dr. Quill continued, Stan again confirming the not entirely false information. 'And you're sure that nothing happened between the car ride from there to here, such as an even greater accident like a traffic collision-?'

'Can you please just tell us how Richie is doing?' Eddie finally snaps, Dr. Quill focusing his attention on him instead; the longer he takes to tell them Richie is okay, the more antsy he gets, and by this point he's ready to reach over the table and grab him by his scrubs. The only thing preventing him from doing so is Ben and Beverly both holding onto either arm softly to calm him down.

Dr. Quill gives Eddie a moment before speaking again, this time directly at Eddie and not at Stan. 'So, as of right now, Richard is stable. He suffered a very high-risk compound fracture, meaning that not only did the bone completely break in half, which is interesting to me unless he was on the roof when the house collapsed, but also it tore through the skin. Since the bone broke through, he was at risk for an infection, which he'll be treated for with antibiotics while he's here, along with a tetanus booster since he rarely sees a hospital according to his records.' He stops for a moment to raise an eyebrow to Eddie's surprise. 'You should see to it that he takes better care of himself in the future.' His eyebrow lowers again as he reads over his clipboard one final time, adding, 'He also has a minor concussion and is currently getting a blood transfusion, hence the long wait before any of you can see him, there was a lot more that needed our attention after his leg.'

The guilt pools in Eddie's stomach as he listens to the doctor. He'd known it'd been bad from the start, but to actually have it all confirmed in front of him was like a punch to the gut. The guilt comes back full force, eating away at him as the images swirl angrily in his mind, reminding him that if he'd been faster, or more careful, or just grabbed his hand in time, then maybe Richie would be okay and it would be himself in his place; he was used to hospitals, he was used to the medication and the doctors and the recovering, there was no one he'd ever wish this upon, least of all Richie. He crosses his arms in front of his stomach and squeezes, his hands shaking a bit as he grips his sleeves. Ben notices first as he links his arm through Eddie's, Bev following suit until they've created a three person chain of comfort behind the others.

'Are there any questions?' Dr. Quill then asks them, Stan and Mike jumping in to speak not just on Eddie's behalf but out of their own worry as well; how long he has to be in the hospital for, and how long it's going to take to heal. 'Three days,' he answers first, 'time for us to monitor him and make sure the antibiotics are taking and the

wound is on the right track to healing properly. As for his full recovery, it could be at least four to six months, and even then there's a chance he'll never fully heal. The break was clean but whatever his leg was submerged in in that house created a great risk to the area, only time will tell now.'

Final question. 'Cuh-can we see him, when he wakes up I mean?' Bill asks when it falls quiet, asking the one thing they'd all like to know.

Dr. Quill looks remorseful, 'You should probably come back tomorrow; that would be for the best so there's no distraction as he's healing from the surgery. He was still asleep when I last saw him due to the anaesthetics anyway, so you wouldn't be able to talk to him yet. Maybe around 9 AM tomorrow morning at the earliest would be better. He would be wide awake by that point and breakfast would be over so you're less likely to be interrupted during your visit.'

Eddie's shoulders sag, along with the rest of the Losers as they take it in; not being able to see Richie for the entire rest of the day? How is he going to be able to sleep tonight not knowing how Richie is doing between now and 9 tomorrow?

Bill speaks up once more, 'Can you let Richie nuh-nuh-know that we're going to be c-coming tomorrow, when he wakes up, then?' The doctor gives him a reassuring smile and a simple, 'Of course,' Bill shaking his hand once more as they finish up and empty back into the hallway. The Losers make the overly long trip back downstairs as a heavy weight settles down on them. They may have defeated It, but it doesn't feel like victory, not with Eddie's stab wound, or the gash on Mike's arm, or the cuts running up Stan's arms.

The gap where Richie is missing feels like a black hole as they walk,

so empty and devoid of the prominent presence that they'd all grown to accustomed to since their return. It definitely doesn't feel like they're the winners for once when he's laying unconscious somewhere deep in the hospital as doctors try to put him back together. The secretary watches them leave as they pass through the sliding doors, the air outside fresh and full of warmth that falls upon numb skin as they head to their cars.

They all share a group hug once they're out in the parking lot, unable to hold off any longer thanks to this overwhelming feeling of separation thanks to Richie's absence, even if it's just for 21 more hours.

They pile into Mike and Ben's cars respectively, Eddie sitting in the back with Bill while Stan sits in the front with Mike. It isn't until they're passing the library on the way back to the townhouse that they remember about Bowers. Mike screeches to a halt as it hits them all at once, the four sharing a look before pulling into the parking lot and heading for the front door. It looks like he didn't have to break in due to Mike waiting for them all the night before, so there's no real signs of breaking and entering aside from the shattered display case and the very dead body still lying on the floor.

'What do we do about him?' Eddie asks as they stand around him, the axe still planted in the back of his head. Mike isn't entirely sure, and Stan looks like he's thinking hard about it; thanks to them visiting the hospital and reporting that Mike's injuries were from the collapse, it feels like they've lost their chance to come up with a fake robbery attempt now, hours and hours after the incident occurred. The fact that the sun is high in the sky makes it difficult for them to even think about dumping the body elsewhere, if it were even something they could do had it still be the dead of night.

They're still thinking it over when Ben and Bev rush in, also reminded thanks to driving past the building, and this time Bev is much calmer seeing the body laying there. Now that the initial shock has worn off, none of them really care that Bowers is dead, all of their focus dedicated solely to not getting Mike and Richie framed from murder, even if the victim was an attempted murderer himself.

It's Stan who moves first, asking where the cleaning supplies are before going off and grabbing them. Silently they follow suit when he returns, tidying up anything that could be traced back to Richie, no one wanting to clean up his vomit until Bev gets annoyed and does it herself.

They work for a half hour without a word other than, 'Watch out,' or, 'Coming through,' Bill and Ben dragging Bowers off to the side so they could sweep up the glass and mop up the blood. Eddie sticks to tasks that don't involve any bodily fluids in the least, although his mind is still mainly on Richie rather than all the diseases they could get from the dirty work. No one brings it up, but deep down it feels like they all want him to say something, like hearing him chastise Bill for not covering his mouth while spraying cleaner on the particularly stained parts of the floor would be better than this silence.

When no evidence is left, Bill and Ben drag Bowers down to the basement while Mike writes up a note to paste on the door saying that the library is temporarily closed for repairs. It isn't much, but not many people have been stopping by in favour of enjoying summer vacation, so he doubts he'll get much flak for a few days to settle this. When the note is written Mike goes downstairs to join the others, leaving Eddie alone upstairs with Stan and Bev as they clean the relics in the bathroom. Nothing was too badly damaged in the crash, but Bowers blood still had to be scrubbed off of the axe before it could be put back on display, and none of them were rushing to take the job.

It isn't long before it's the last object left, and Eddie stares at it before muttering a low, 'This is so fucked up,' and reaching past Stan to pick it up. He's wearing two pairs of gloves just in case, and he's staying a fair distance away from the running water to avoid any splashback getting on him, and neither Stan nor Bev are giving him a hard time about it. They wait for him to finish before they bring everything back to the main room and lay it all neatly on an empty section of Mike's desk, silence once again taking over until they heard Mike's distant voice rising up from down the hall.

'Sorry to call so close to your shift, but I don't need you to come in today, Donna,' he was saying as he walked, the trio coming into view through the shelves, 'no, nothing is wrong, one of the legs on the big display case broke last night so I'm just cleaning up for today. Yeah, glass was everywhere, shattered the lid to pieces. We should be open again in a couple days while I buy a new case and make sure there was no damage done to anything inside, I've been meaning to take a weekend off anyway.' He laughs loudly, but they can all see that his face holds no joy. 'Alright, enjoy your paid vacation, even if it is a little one, and I'll see you Monday afternoon, bye.' He hangs up and pockets his phone, looking over the room before letting out a tired sigh. 'That should buy us some time to deal with him tonight, so let's get back to the townhouse for now.'

This time Eddie doesn't have to be convinced to leave as they all climb back into their cars.

#### **Author's Note:**

thank you for reading! you can find me at  
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